



Transportation Advisory Committee

Date: December 9, 2020.

Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM.

Location: Conducted via Remote Participation (Zoom).

Minutes.

1. Administration.

Members in Attendance: Dan Amstutz, Michael Barry, Bill Copithorne (for Wayne Chouinard), Lenard Diggins, Ray Jones, Melissa Laube, Howard Muise, Tycho Nightingale, Scott Smith, Laura Swan, and Shoji Takahashi.

Members Missing: Wayne Chouinard, Jeff Maxtutis, and Corey Rateau.

Members of Public in Attendance: Jennifer Griffith, Stephanie Kiefer, Christian Klein, Art Klipfel, Greg Lucas, Kevin Mills, Gwen Noyer, Steve Revilak, Derek Roach, and Scott Thornton.

The Chair read the script for remotely conducted meetings, referred the members to the agenda attachment entitled "Governor Charles Baker's 3/12/2020 Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law," announced that the meeting was being recorded and reviewed the meeting ground rules.

The minutes of the November 10, 2020 meeting were approved on a roll call vote.

The Chair noted that TAC received a letter from Arlington resident Jennifer Griffith after the agenda was made regarding the Thorndike Place Traffic Impact Assessment.

2. Public Comments.

There were no public comments.

3. Thorndike Place: Transportation Impact Assessment (TIA).

Dan Amstutz introduced Derek Roach and Scott Thornton of Vanasse & Associates, Inc. (VAI), of Andover, MA, and Greg Lucas of BETA Group, Inc. (BETA), of Norwood, MA. VAI prepared the Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) for the proposed Thorndike Place development and BETA is conducting third-party peer review of transportation for the

Town of Arlington. TAC had reviewed previously a TIA for an earlier development plan.

Scott Thornton began his presentation of the multi-unit residential development describing the project site. The project site (Mugar property) is adjacent to Route 2 on the southside and Thorndike Field on the eastside. Situated across Route 2 are two newer developments: Vox on Two and Tempo Cambridge.

Access to the development will be via Littlejohn Street, which connects to Lake Street, which provides access to Route 2 ramps and Mass Ave. The site is approximately 0.8 of a mile from Alewife Station via the Minuteman Bikeway.

The proposed development will comprise 174 Units with 239 parking spaces. In addition, there will be 144 sheltered bike parking spaces. The revised proposal is much smaller than the previous design.

Project mitigation measures will be provided to reduce personal vehicle use. Transportation Demand Management (TDM) for the project include a new Bluebikes Station near the Bikeway; sheltered bicycle parking on site; a transportation coordinator; transit screen installation (similar to those at Discovery Park and Vox on Two), which provide information on transit options and schedules.

For the TIA study area, VAI worked with BETA and Dan Amstutz to identify relevant intersections to be studied. VAI used traffic data collected in 2020 and a mix of previously collected data to establish baseline traffic volumes (pre-pandemic). As expected, Lake Street traffic volume in 2020 was dramatically lower than in the past. To account for the impact of COVID-19 and seasonal variation in traffic volumes, volumes from the nearest permanent count station (Route 128 and Route 2 interchange) were analyzed to calculate an adjustment factor. The appropriateness of this adjustment was discussed with BETA, which concurred with the approach.

To provide an approximation of mode share for project residents' travel, VAI used mode share data from Vox on Two (located 0.5 miles from Alewife Station) to establish mode shares for Thorndike Place. The latest travel share data from Vox on Two was as follows: single-occupancy vehicles (SOV) 39 percent; transit 35 percent; bike 5 percent; and walk 14 percent. VAI applied these mode shares to Thorndike Place.

VAI's overall conclusion is that Thorndike Place development will contribute an additional vehicle every 2 minutes to area roadways. This vehicular traffic contribution is a decrease of 56 – 64 percent compared to the previous TIA study, which was a much larger project. VAI concluded its presentation and opened the session for questions.

Scott Smith asked whether the walking mode share from Vox on Two included people who were walking to Alewife Station to use transit. Scott Thornton responded that it was not clear, however Vox on Two residents also could be walking to Discovery Park. Scott Smith followed up by questioning the applicability of applying the Vox on Two mode shares to Thorndike Place, noting Vox on Two's closer proximity to Discovery Park, which would contribute to higher walk percentage; closer proximity to Alewife Station, which would promote higher transit use; and constrained parking, which could reduce vehicular mode share.

Melissa Laube concurred with Scott Smith, adding that the very large reduction in vehicle numbers compared to the previous TIA is not substantiated in the VAI report. Scott Thornton conceded that Thorndike Place might have a higher number of vehicle trips than in the projection provided in the TIA. Greg Lucas added that the mode share used is similar to the Census data of 35 percent transit. It is not clear what the destinations of people who reported walking or bicycling were. The study might need to increase the estimated vehicle volume for the TIA. Howard Muise added that Census data vehicle mode share for the area was 45 percent.

Scott Smith followed up asking about alternative connections through the project site to shorten the connection to Alewife for pedestrians and bicyclists. Mike Barry added that access to Edith Street to shorten the distance could be beneficial. Scott Thornton responded that VAI is examining the possibility noting the challenges of environmentally sensitive areas on the project site.

Ray Jones inquired about the nearby Route 2 pedestrian overpass and whether it was integrated with Thorndike Place plans. Scott Thornton responded that the pedestrian overpass is not part of the project. Greg Lucas added that the pedestrian overpass is structurally sound but poses problems with disability and bicycle access. It is not clear what the intended path by foot would be to/from the pedestrian bridge. Mike Barry inquired about direct vehicular access to Route 2 from Thorndike Place. Scott Thornton responded that previous proposals had looked at the possibility but direct access to Route 2 is not in this proposal.

Laura Swan inquired about improvements to Dorothy Road and/or Littlejohn Street, pointing out that there is no sidewalk on the project side of Dorothy Road. She also asked for clarification on the project slide showing a path behind the project building. Scott Thornton responded that there will be a sidewalk along the project site. There will be a route/path along the property, but not into environmentally sensitive areas.

Dan Amstutz asked why the proposed Bluebikes station was being located at Thorndike Field and not on the project site. Scott Thornton responded that a Bluebikes station could be placed on site. The thinking

is that providing a station at the Bikeway could be an amenity for the entire neighborhood.

Dan Amstutz inquired about the small parking lot in front of building. Scott Thornton responded that it could be a place for visitor parking, short-term delivery, and Uber/Lyft loading.

Dan Amstutz inquired about traffic control at the project site driveway. Scott Thornton responded that there will be STOP sign control at the driveway and consideration could be given to an all-way or Dorothy Road STOP control.

Dan Amstutz pointed out that the TIA included vehicle turns assigned to Littlejohn Street although there is a peak period turn prohibition from Lake Street. He asked if VAI is proposing a change in the existing prohibition. Scott Thornton acknowledged the turn prohibition. However, he noted that there is traffic making those turns, which is why it is included in the calculation. VAI is not proposing any change in existing turn prohibitions.

Howard Muise clarified that the turn prohibition is to stop cut-thru traffic into the neighborhood. Calculations should not include directing traffic into making wrong-way movements.

Howard Muise expressed that the Town concern is on traffic volume on Lake Street. He asked for VAI to include projected vehicle counts on Lake Street east of Margaret Street and between Littlejohn Street and the Route westbound ramps. He also noted that the TIA projects that the level of service (LOS) on the eastbound approach the Lake Street/Bikeway signalized intersection improves from Level E to A (AM traffic) and Level D to A (PM traffic which pre-pandemic backed up to Route 2). Howard Muise requested that this be reexamined as it is a very dramatic improvement that is hard to believe. Scott Thornton agreed that it is a dramatic improvement. However, he observed that the newly installed signal could alleviate congestion. Howard Muise disagreed with this conclusion. Although the new Bikeway signal is coordinated with the signal at Brooks Ave, the study needs to account for pedestrian crossings in the morning period as there is a crossing guard for the Hardy School who calls the pedestrian phase every cycle at peak school times. Previous Lake St and Bikeway projections and analysis indicated that there still would be significant queuing on Lake Street eastbound. Scott Thornton responded that the study incorporates expected movements and traffic signaling.

Howard Muise asked whether the Thorndike Place project needs all 239 parking spaces, noting that the number of parking spaces is based on the Town Zoning Code. He also asked whether the southside parking spaces are for renters. Scott Thornton responded that perhaps the number of parking spaces could be reduced, but the project does not

need any waivers as it can provide the Town-required parking spaces. He confirmed that the southside parking spaces are designed for renters.

Howard Muese asked VAI to consider subsidized T passes as part of the TDM program. Scott Thornton responded that it has not been examined.

Bill Copithorne inquired about the suitability of using the permanent count station (Route 128 and Route 2 interchange) data to derive an adjustment factor and how driving habits might change after COVID-19. Will more people be driving after the pandemic? Greg Lucas responded that many in the transportation field think that industry/commuter traffic will take a few years to return to normal; estimated traffic volume will be staying lower post COVID-19 for some time. Dan Amstutz agreed about lower traffic volumes post COVID-19.

Public Comments: Jennifer Griffith, who submitted a letter after agenda was made, made a few points to the TAC.

(1) Vox on Two is not a good comparison for Thorndike Place. She notes that Vox on Two is comprised predominantly of studio and 1-bedroom apartments marketed to young couples without children. Thorndike Place is likely to have more families, with the need to drive to schools (e.g., AHS, OMS), thereby increasing vehicle mode.

(2) The traffic signal at the Bikeway will not substantially improve vehicular traffic flow on Lake Street. Thorndike Place will cause vehicle volume to increase on Lake Street. At present, leaving the neighborhood at commuting times is a challenge and a safety concern. Because of the traffic backup on Lake Street, there is no space to turn onto Lake Street and poor sightlines because of the vehicle backup. She also does not believe the estimate on vehicle volume.

(3) Tremendous cut-thru traffic through the neighborhood. Traffic calming is necessary for safety reasons.

Howard Muese concluded discussion of Thorndike Place. The TAC Executive Committee will provide comments to the ZBA and TAC.

4. Town Issues/Activities.

A. Bill Copithorne provided an update from the Department of Public Works (DPW):

It is now the end of construction season: all road paving and resurfacing is finished for the season, as are pavement markings due to the cold

temperatures. Pavement markings that have not been completed will be done in the spring (e.g., bike lane markings on Lake Street).

Minuteman Bikeway and Lake Street traffic signal is now at substantial completion. Signals have been on flash mode for almost two weeks. Next Tuesday, a technician will set the signal and coordinate its timing with the signal at Brooks Ave. The signal will be operational for one month at which point Green International Consulting will return to review and finalize the system.

Sunnyside sidewalk project now has the east-side curb installed. Paving for the sidewalk will start tomorrow with a possible finish this week. Concrete curb ramps are scheduled for installation next week.

Appleton Street and Massachusetts Ave: DPW expects to receive a preliminary design for short- and mid-term changes from Green International Consulting. DPW had reviewed a draft version and requested changes before presenting to the TAC.

B. Dan Amstutz provided an update from the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

Connect Arlington Virtual Forum is scheduled for Monday. A survey is now available on the Town Website, with a submission deadline of next Friday. Draft strategies and recommendations (developed by Nelson\Nygaard) will be presented on Monday. Community outreach on strategies and recommendations in the plan will take place in the new year.

MBTA Forging Ahead Plan: The Town Manager and State Delegation sent a letter to the MBTA regarding the impact of proposed service cuts to the community, including the proposed elimination of bus routes 79 and 80. The MBTA's independent advisory board noted that the proposed deep cuts are not necessary at this time. ACMi News will have a news report on the proposed MBTA service cuts including an interview with Dan Amstutz on Friday.

Howard Muise reported that the Town and Consigli Construction (AHS rebuild construction manager) signed a Guaranteed Maximum Price agreement. The cost of the rebuild is now set, which permits the Town to add back several items that were removed to keep the project within budget. Pertinent to the TAC, the restored items include: (1) connection between the Minuteman Bikeway and AHS; and (2) traffic signal at Mill Street and Millbrook Dr. Previously, the TAC had recommended that a signal at Mill Street will require further review to ascertain the traffic impacts of the new building.

C. There was no update from the Police Department (APD).

5. Washington Street Resident Safety Concerns.

The TAC received an email from the Select Board regarding resident safety concerns on a section of Washington Street between Brattle Terrace and Brattle Street. This section is steep with a sharp curve that has caused traffic flow problems. The roadway surface has many potholes.

Howard Muise suggested that the TAC can review the section and make recommendations, such as consider one-way traffic flow. However, abutters would have to pay for and implement any improvements. Scott Smith noted its proximity to the Minuteman Bikeway, and the MBTA has right-of-way along part of the section. Bill Copithorne inquired about past precedent for the TAC providing private-way recommendations. Howard Muise responded that TAC has made recommendations in the past, such as a private way near the Bishop School. He reiterated that it is the responsibility of the abutters to make improvements, if any.

Melissa Laube, Tycho Nightingale, and Shoji Takahashi will form a group to review Washington Street.

6. Massachusetts Ave at Bates Road.

The TAC received a request from the Select Board regarding a left-turn signal for eastbound traffic on Mass Ave at Bates Road. Howard Muise asked whether DPW had received any complaints at this intersection. Bill Copithorne responded that he was not aware of any. DPW will examine the existing hardware to see what might be possible. He added that Mass DOT might need to be contacted because the signal was part of the East Arlington Mass Ave Corridor Project.

7. Discussion: Mass Ave Crosswalks at Water Street, Town Hall, and Academy Street.

The Water Street/Robbins Library crosswalk at Mass Ave was examined by the TAC a number of years ago, which resulted in the no left turn movements out of the library and Water Street. Mass Ave Phase II Project provides an opportunity to improve the Water St crosswalk. TAC can move fairly quickly on providing recommendations to the Select Board. Dan Amstutz added that funds from the Parking Benefits District might be accessed for such improvements.

8. Update: Thompson School Traffic Calming

Laura Swan indicated that Karen Donato, Thompson School Principal, will work with Judy Crocker of Mass DOT Safe Routes to School to observe arrival and dismissal times. Scott Smith added that MassBike partners with Safe Routes to School for bicycle education, and perhaps its programs would function well with Connect Arlington (Dan Amstutz).

9. Discussion: Eskar Marijuana Dispensary.

Review of the Eskar Marijuana Dispensary Traffic Impact Analysis was completed and submitted. TAC requested one-way circulation through the parking lot and also recommended adding no left turn signage and pavement for traffic exiting onto Sunnyside Ave to limit traffic into the Sunnyside Ave neighborhood.

10. Update: Chestnut Street Traffic Calming.

Bill Copithorne provided an update that DPW has reviewed rotaries and MassDOT requirements. Based on preliminary investigation of traffic volumes, the design would require a two-lane roundabout. Space is available only for a one-lane design unless space is taken from the municipal lot. DPW has mostly ruled out a roundabout as a solution for this intersection.

DPW is working on a layout of existing conditions and draft plan with bump outs.

Howard Muise will pull together a draft proposal on short-term improvements. Chestnut St. on list for repaving in 2021 but DPW might delay repaving until after short-term improvements are identified.

Money under the MassDOT Shared Streets program might be available.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.